

2021 CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH

PLANNING RESOURCES FOR CONGREGATIONS & CONFERENCES



Families: Many Forms, Living Faithfully! Called to Love

The Christian Home Month resource is for family ministry leaders, ministry teams, and council chairpersons/coordinators in local congregations. It is designed to help local congregations develop and strengthen faith in the home and to celebrate Christian Home Month. Although Christian Home Month is typically celebrated during the month of May, congregations may choose any month of the year to focus on the Christian home and its key role as a center for faith formation.

Our theme for 2021 is **Families Called to Love**. This is an appropriate theme for the current context in which we find our daily lives. We live in a tumultuous time; the COVID-19 pandemic has completely changed the way we view the world. This past year, we have seen a presidential election, continued political tensions, racism, and social unrest. Children, youth, and young people are concerned with the deep divisions in this country, disappointed at the disagreements, and witness to name-calling and loss of human respect. It may seem, as we watch the events of society unfold, that we have forgotten to live life that way Jesus

called us to live—a life of love for self, neighbor, and God. We know that as Christians, we are called to be a people of love. We offer love to the world where everyone will feel and experience God's love, peace, justice, and grace.

The scriptures provide key verses that speak to love of self, neighbor, and God. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 reminds us to love God and to keep those words of love visible throughout the day. It also instructs us to demonstrate this love to our children. Through Jesus' words in John 13:34-35, we are commanded to love one another. Christ followers' actions should be rooted in love, and love is essential to individual faith

CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH QUADRENNIAL THEMES 2021-2024

2021: Families Called to Love
2022: Families Called to Peace
2023: Families Called to Justice
2024: Families Called to Hope

formation and faith formation in homes and families. When we act with love toward those in our family, we are also challenged to act in love with those in our communities and in the world.

This Christian Home Month resource, **Families: Called to Love**, includes worship service resources, a virtual/hybrid retreat plan, and devotional activities for families as they foster a climate of love in their homes. We trust that you will find something in this resource that will inspire, encourage, and affirm you as you continue in this important work of family ministries.

CALLED TO LOVE: WORSHIP SERVICE RESOURCES

Here are some suggestions that may be useful in celebrating Christian Home Month or Family Life Sunday as part of a worship service. For additional resources, see *The United Methodist Book of Worship*.

Call to Worship

Leader: We come together to praise God who is the source of our life and our love.

People: We lift our voices in praise for God who loves us always.

Leader: We come to celebrate and support families who practice love in their homes and communities.

People: We lift our voices in thanks for the love we feel in our families.

Leader: We come praying for families who feel no love for themselves or for others.

People: We lift our voices in sorrow for those who hurt because of the actions of others.

All: Let us worship, trusting in God's love and mercy.

Hymns

(Choose which hymns most fit your worship service)

- "Good of Grace and God of Glory," *UMH 577*
- "Let Our Earth Be Peaceful," *W&S 3159*
- "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," *UMH 384*
- "The Gift of Love," *UMH 408*
- "Your Love, O God, Has Called Us Here," *UMH 647*
- "There's a Song," *TFWS 2141*
- "Build My Life," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z32HiCoFzIU>
- "God Is Great," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6V9I6QZVJOs>
- "God Is Love," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uviM4Z34J6o>
- "Head to the Heart," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSol3_QZaal

Scripture Readings

Lectionary readings for the day may be used, or you may choose from the following:

- Old Testament: Deuteronomy 6:4-9
- Psalter: Psalm 85, *UMH 806*
- Gospel: John 13:34-35
- Epistle: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Liturgical Acts

Prayer of Commitment: 1 Corinthians 13

Lord, because love is patient...Help me to be slow to judge, but quick to listen, hesitant to criticize, but eager to encourage, remembering your endless patience with me.

Because love is kind...Help my words to be gentle and my actions to be thoughtful. Remind me to smile and to say "Please" and "Thank You" because those little things still mean so much.

Because love does not envy or boast, and it is not proud... Help me have a heart that is humble and sees the good in others. May I celebrate and appreciate all that I have and all that I am, as well as doing the same for those around me.

Because love is not rude or self-seeking...Help me to speak words that are easy on the ear and on the heart. When I'm tempted to get wrapped up in my own little world, remind me there's a great big world out there full of needs and hurts.

Because love is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs...Help me to forgive others as you have forgiven me.

When I want to hold onto a grudge, gently help me release it, so I can reach out with a hand of love instead.

Because love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth...Help me stand up for what is right and good. May I defend the defenseless and help the helpless. Show me how I can make a difference.

Because love always protects and always trusts...Help me to be a refuge for those around me. When the world outside is harsh and cold, may my heart be a place of acceptance and warmth.

Finally, because love always perseveres...Help my heart continually beat with love for You and others. Thank you for showing us what the word love really means. Amen.

Written by Holley Gerth and posted on Taking it one step at a time, <http://onestep87.blogspot.ca>.

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■ CALLED TO LOVE: WORSHIP SERVICE RESOURCES

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Opening Prayer

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. (1 Cor.13:13)

God of Gods:

We come to worship today to hear your good news,
to hear of faith, hope and love
ringing out from your kingdom.

We know that doubt, fear and hatred
can shake even the strongest.

Shape us into faithful hopeful people,
fill us with your love that passes all understanding.

We pray this together in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

*Written by Carol Penner and Posted on Leading in Worship,
<https://carolpenner.typepad.com/leadinginworship/prayers-call-to-worship/page/4>*

Reflection on Love

"Love Is..."

Love is... hugs

Love is... a pick me up

Love is... when two become one

Love is... friendship

Love is... sharing the last piece of pizza

Love is... hard to explain

Love is... unbelievable

Love is... unpredictable

Love is... giving away your last rolo

Love is... endless

Love is... protection

Love is... a rollercoaster

Love is... a smile

Love is... a heartbeat

Love is... patient

Love is... kind

Love is... a never-ending story

Love is... eternal

Love is... a circle of friends

Love is... a circle of eternity

Love is... a circle called God

Love is... all you need

<http://newkilpatrickblog.typepad.com/nk-blogging/mucky-paws>. Used by permission.

Prayer: Encounters with Jesus

Draw me today into fresh encounters with Jesus, O God.

Make me a servant of love

so that others may know how much You love them
and I may know how much You love me.

Let me not be afraid of new pastures,
whether they be green or brown or parched.

And as I pass through whatever the day's valleys,
keep my head lifted up to the mountain,

from whence my help comes.

Never let me forget the people Jesus welcomed...

the greedy and the great,

the bad and the good,

he respected and the cheats.

Even as the world becomes more callous and chaotic,

may I never underestimate Your capacity

to fashion the miraculous from the monstrous,

even to make me a choice masterpiece

from the mire and the clay.

*Written by Leonard Sweet, posted on Preach the Story,
<https://preachthestory.com>; reposted on re:Worship, <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2016/11/prayer-encounters-with-jesus.html>.*

CALLED TO LOVE: FAMILY DEVOTIONAL TIMES

FAMILY DEVOTION: Prepare a gathering place for family worship. Create a centerpiece on the table where you eat your meals or in another area of your home where you can gather as a family. Spend time together preparing the space that you will use for your family devotional time. During your time of devotion, follow this worship sequence:

- **Praise:** Give God praise with a song, statement of “We Praise God,” or motion to represent all honor and glory to be given to God. (NBA player Steph Curry gives God praise each time he scores a basket by patting his heart with his hand and then pointing toward heaven. This simple, yet powerful, motion speaks louder than any words used in a crowded NBA arena.)
- **Prayer:** Create a family prayer, use a familiar existing family prayer, or say the Lord’s Prayer. Hold hands as you pray.
- **Reading:** Read a scripture passage from this resource that reflects upon the word “love.” Invite each family member to select a different passage each time you gather.
- **Reflection:** Reflect on the passage and wonder together:
 - What did you see as this scripture was read?
 - What did you hear as this scripture was read?
 - What actions can you take after this scripture was read?
 - What do we learn about God from this passage?
 - What do we learn about love from this passage?
- **Sharing:** Spend time sharing joys, concerns, and prayer requests that you have encountered as individuals and as a family.
- **Blessing:** End the time together with a blessing. Use a hymn such as the “Doxology,” or offer a blessing to each family member by saying phrases such as, “God be with you.” Using a small Chapstick, create the shape of a cross on your family member’s hand, while saying:

God loves you.

Christ is with you.

The Holy Spirit moves through you.

As you share God’s hope with the world.

Family Night. Set aside a regular time for sharing fun family activities together. You could do the same activity each time (play board games, cook special treats, volunteer as a family in service to others, learn about people who live different lives from yours). Another idea is for each family night to be planned by a different family member, with an activity agreed upon by all.

DO HOLY WORK TOGETHER

Love God

Remember your blessings, individually and as a family. Eat dinner together as a family. During the past year, most families have discovered family mealtime has become a time for deep meaning and to grow in relationship with one another. Make dinnertime worth the effort and spend time together offering and receiving love. Go around the table and ask family members to share when they demonstrated or witnessed an act of love that day. Encourage noticing those daily experiences and name them before the meal.

Show God’s Love

TIME TOGETHER: (Read and pray together) Read Matthew 22: 37-40 from the Message translation:

Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.’ This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ These two commands are pegs; everything in God’s Law and the Prophets hangs from them.”

We tend to use one word to describe the concept or idea “love”. The writer of The Message compares... heart to passion, soul to prayer, and mind to intelligence.

Use some of the following questions to have a discussion around understanding love:

- Do you think you have a heart to love God with a passion? What does that look like?
- How often do you find yourself praying?
- When you pray, do you feel the need to use special words or go to a special place?
- What do you think God says about prayer?
- How is it that we can love God with our mind or intelligence?

Love Neighbor

Wonder together as a family what Jesus meant by saying, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

“Love isn’t a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like struggle. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way he or she is, right here and now.” – Fred Rogers.

Name a time you accepted a person exactly the way he or she was. Discuss that as an act of love.

Identify people in your community who need to know God’s love (someone who has just lost a family member, someone

■ CALLED TO LOVE: FAMILY DEVOTIONAL TIMES

struggling in school, someone new to your community, someone who can no longer drive a car, someone who is sick, someone who just lost a job).

Come up with a plan to show love of those neighbors that you named. Transform love of neighbor into action! Make cards together as a family to send to those who need to know God's love; or visit someone from your church or your community who is alone and needs to know there are those who care about him or her. (Make sure you follow all safety protocols when physically visiting others.)

Come up with other creative ways to express God's love to "your neighbor." How can you show and tell others about the powerful love that God has for them?

Feel the Love of God

What is one of your first memories of being loved?

Were you alone or with someone else when you experienced love for the first time?

Talk about a time when you did not feel loved.

Talk about an experience when you realized that God loves you.

What are some loving experiences you have had at church – small group, worship, on retreat, during a special program?

To find love, we must learn to love. Find ways to enhance learning to love one another.

- **Journal:** Place a spiral notebook somewhere readily available for the entire family. When you see a sign of God's love in your daily life or see an example of learning to love one another, write it down or draw a picture of it in the notebook. Place a Bible verse that demonstrates an example of love next to the entry in the journal. How many verses of scripture reflect love?

Spend time in prayer and discussion with the entries in the journal.

- **Heartbeat of love:** Create a small familiar Valentine's Day heart out of construction paper or make a tiny stuffed heart out of fabric. You may already have an eraser or heart from a Build-a-Bear visit that you could use. Use this symbol to reflect acts of love you witness another family member perform. Place it somewhere in the house (or vehicle) where that family member might find it. Once the family member has found the item, tell that person about the act of love that you witnessed that person providing. This will create an energetic way of offering affirmation that will become contagious. Then,

it's that family member's turn to hide a symbol, witness someone's actions, and tell.

Finish This Sentence

Another way to create conversation is to play a simple game of finish the sentence. Complete one of these sentences or create your own:

I know God is with me when...

I would like to share stories of Jesus to...

The best church service ever was when...

My favorite memory about church is...

If I preached a sermon, it would be about...

I love to be with my family when we...

A person that I have seen share God's love is...

My favorite scripture from the Bible about love is...

Love Comes with Forgiveness

This past year, there have been multiple examples of hate in society by groups or individuals. To love one another also means forgiving those who do not accept us as we are or doing harm to others. Spend time talking about these hard issues found in the news today. Read together stories from the media; then ask, "How would God want us to act in this situation? What would 'loving God and loving others' look like in this situation?" As a family, decide what actions you might take to offer love and forgiveness to others.

The familial discussion around love and forgiveness can lead to a powerful conversation around social justice currently in the news. Spend time with the recommended books and have meaningful family discussions on issues of violence, racial relations, and traumatic events in the world.

Recommended Books:

- *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael López.

This book has captured the hearts and minds of thousands of children. It teaches children how to be confident with who they are as they explore the world around them and meet people who may be different from them. This book is also available in Spanish, *El Día En Que Descubres Qui n Eres*.

- *Something Happened in Our Town* by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard, illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin.

Intended for children as young as four years old, this important story follows one black family and one white
(continued on next page)

family as they talk about a police shooting in their hometown. This book helps parents answer questions about racism, how to identify it, and what to do about it. The book includes an extensive “Note to Parents and Caregivers” with guidelines for discussing race and racism with children, child-friendly definitions, and sample dialogues.

The companion book, *Something Happened in Our Park: Standing Together After Gun Violence*, is also available.

Family Prayer

God, we give you thanks because you have done and continue to do amazing things! Thank you for offering so many examples of love from the Bible for a better world during these difficult days. There is no greater example than Jesus. Help each member of our family follow you and offer love and forgiveness to ourselves and our neighbors in our daily lives. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH

- Reprint the “Family Devotional Times” material from this resource in your church newsletter and place it on your website. List one suggestion a month to ensure continuity. Ask families who followed the suggestions to write about their experience (or tell you about it). Create a “What is Love?” column in your newsletter or on your website and feature what these families did in following through with the suggestions.
- Plan a family fun time at church. Include a meal and use the time there to make “heartbeat” reminders or Scripture and prayer cards.
- Encourage families to adopt the “Family Covenant for Love” and carry out the practices for at least a month. Suggest a starting day for all in the congregation who want to participate. As part of worship, ask those who intend to live with the covenant to stand. Pray for the families. On the ending date, ask all families who lived with the covenant to stand. Recognize by affirmation each family by name and join in singing the Doxology to voice thanks to God for their efforts. You could establish the tradition used on the retreat by saying “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

FAMILY COVENANT FOR LOVE

Create a covenant together as you promise to grow in love for God and others. Every month, take time to ask, “How have we lived into our covenant?” Celebrate how you have shown God’s love for one another. Then make any changes that might be needed for the next month.

This covenant will be in effect from _____ (beginning date) to _____ (ending date).

In order that our family may be one that promotes love for one another, we promise one another to:

1. Spend time eating, playing, and praying together.
2. Look for ways family members show love to one another and praise one another for loving acts.
3. Learn about organizations that address hurts and needs of families, and choose a way to offer service to one of these.
4. Seek out stories of love at church, in the news, at school, and at work and tell these stories to one another.

Signed by: _____

(All family members sign the covenant.)

■ CALLED TO LOVE: A HYBRID RETREAT MODEL

Planning for the Retreat

Due to the lingering effects of COVID-19, this year's retreat is adapted to a hybrid format that provides for both in-person and online aspects.

1. The congregation prays for the hybrid retreat, the participating families, and the coordinating team.
2. A retreat planning team is created, made up of six to eight people from the congregation. This team should be equally knowledgeable in online technology and in-person leadership.
3. The retreat team meets and plans the retreat:
 - Chooses a weekend to offer the retreat. If the location is not the church, the venue should be secured.
 - Decides on the retreat schedule, including times for prayer and worship.
 - Troubleshoots any technological concerns that may be foreseen. Have a tech advisor to help troubleshoot. Youth are excellent in that role.
 - Recruits leaders. Provides Safe Sanctuary training for all leaders involved with the event.
 - Plans all food menus and suggestions.
 - Creates an offering opportunity for an organization in the community that helps families in need or a small business trying to survive coming out of this pandemic.
 - Promotes the retreat using social media, including the church website and Facebook page.
4. Someone from the team prepares information and distributes it through the church newsletter, e-newsletters, worship bulletins, bulletin boards, and other avenues in the congregation. Registration for the location may be needed and completed for those families participating with the in-person format.
5. The retreat team encourages families to collect the following supplies: hymnals or online access to hymns; Bibles; children's books on love; board games, sports equipment, one poster board per family; magazines; scissors; glue; modeling clay or Play-doh for each small group; various props for skits.

Friday

6:30–7:00 P.M. – Dinner around your family table, both virtually and in person. Encourage every family participating to select one food item that they “love.” Ask families to explain why they love that food item with the rest of those gathered.

7:15–7:30 P.M. – Gathering Time. Establish a Zoom call monitor (the bigger the better) to connect both groups gathering. Share announcements and opening prayer. Sing familiar camp songs, favorite hymns, and praise choruses. Teach the group “Love Lifted Me” (*Worship & Song*, 3101). Sing the familiar “Jesus Loves Me” (*UMH*, 191).

7:30–9:00 P.M. – Divide those gathering in person into “family” groups of four to six people (mixing up actual family members with others in the congregation). Keep those gathered virtually as family units. Ask each group to come up with stories that illustrate love for God and love for neighbor. Categories for stories include (1) Old Testament, (2) New Testament, (3) story about the church, and (4) favorite story from a book or movie. After the “families” agree on the four stories, have them share three clues or pieces of information and have the larger group guess the stories. For example, if the group's story from the Old Testament is “Noah and the Ark,” the three pieces of information could be: (1) A dove is important in this story; (2) An extended family was involved in this story; (3) The rainbow is a sign of a promise in this story.

When the total group gathers, each family group can lead in getting the other family groups to guess the stories.

9:00–9:30 P.M. – Read *The Boy and the Ocean* by Max Lucado to the group. After reading, ask for several people to share their thoughts and feelings about the story and what it has to say about love. Lead the group in a time of prayer, sharing joys and concerns; then sing together.

After 9:30 P.M. – Snack and game time for those gathering in person. Spend time together playing board games and winding down for the evening. If the setting allows, take a short flashlight walk or gather around a firepit. Close by leading the group in a time of prayer, sharing joys and concerns; then sing together. Include families meeting virtually in the prayer time.

Saturday

8:00–9:00 A.M. – Breakfast

9:00–9:30 A.M. – Morning Worship. Lead the group in singing, scripture, and prayer. Begin a responsive prayer by inviting each participant to recite a verse about “love.” Encourage participants to memorize those verses. Each time a participant recites a verse, the group will respond with “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). This encourages everyone to reflect on each verse recited.

9:30–10:30 A.M. – Recreate “families” from the previous night for those gathering in person. Ask the families to read 1 John 4:7-21 from the Common English Bible. Include different voices (readers) when reading passage.

Invite each family to imagine ways of living that reflect this passage from 1 John. Ask each team to create a skit showing how people could live, sharing this understanding of love with others. Advise each family to talk through what members will do and what imagery they see in the scripture text and what imagery comes from their life before moving into creating the skit.

10:30–11:00 A.M. – Break

11:00–11:45 A.M. – Ask the families to present their skits. After each skit, ask the total group to name what imagery of love resonated with the entire group.

NOON–1:00 P.M. – Lunch. Encourage families in person at the retreat and at the retreat virtually to eat the same foods. Discuss the menu prior to participating in the retreat to ensure meals are consistent.

1:00–5:30 P.M. – Afternoon Fun: “I Spy in the Neighborhood” activity. Go on a family walk in the neighborhood/community around the retreat location. If the location is your church, pay particular attention to the area nearby. Point out things you notice for the first time. Spice it up with a game of “I Spy.” While families are walking, have look for items from the list below. Take photos with to share with the retreat families later in the evening.

I Spy Checklist:

- Something flying in the sky
- A crack in the sidewalk
- Someone walking a dog
- Something blue
- A baby being pushed in a stroller
- Water (lake, creek, pool, puddle)
- A sprinkler in a yard
- Something red
- An address that reads “316”
- Sidewalk chalk art
- A bird
- Someone riding a bike
- Something white
- A critter with four legs
- Flowers blooming
- A sign other than a stop sign
- A house that is painted/bricked the same color as yours
- Something that reminds you of God’s love

Encourage outdoor recreation. Provide suggestions/supplies for outdoor family activities such as corn hole, volleyball, croquet, sidewalk and driveway chalk art, basketball football, bike rides or walks in the neighborhood.

5:30–6:30 P.M. – Dinner. Allow each participant to help prepare the meal. Reinforce consistency in meals and

encourage all to have same menu items both virtually and in person.

6:30–7:30 P.M. – Ask the participants to reassemble in their “families.” Ask the groups to reflect upon their story of love they discussed earlier in the retreat. Ask each family group to use modeling clay, Legos®, paper, and markers to create a piece of art that illustrates those stories of love found in the church. Invite group members to reflect on what God’s love looks like in their creations. Stress being creative in the artwork, but also discussing and how the pieces make individuals feel the love of God.

7:30–8:15 P.M. – Gather the full group together and allow each family to share the created art, group members’ thoughts, and feelings of love. Discuss how to execute a plan to share the love of God with others.

8:15–8:30 P.M. – Break

8:30–9:00 P.M. – Lead the group in sharing and praying about their joys and concerns. Recite again, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105) with scripture verse recall. Ask those who wish to name a song, or a second Scripture verse, or something they have seen this day that brought them to experience love.

9:00–10:00 P.M. – Snack and game time. If weather permits, go outside for stargazing or smores around the firepit.

Sunday

8:00–9:00 A.M. – Breakfast together as a family before worship.

9:00–10:00 A.M. – Incorporate a piece of your church worship service to reflect on your hybrid retreat. Continue the continuity and inclusion of virtual participants and find a place for them in your Sunday worship experience. One way to do this is to incorporate a prayer delivered by a participant from the retreat who participated virtually into the worship service. The following prayer is an example:

Prayer for Christian Home Month Families

Gracious God, who created all of humankind and showed to us the importance of relationships with one another, we commend to your care all the families of this congregation, community, and world. We pray that each home may be a home where love is felt. We pray for homes where, instead of love, hurt, abuse, and suffering abide. We pray for children, youth, and adults, recognizing the importance of and the gift of every age as we grow. May your grace be present to all. Grant us wisdom to know where there is no love, courage to act out of love for others, and peace to trust in your grace. Help us to live so that the commandments of love for you and love for others are shown in the ways we live together. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen

CHRISTIAN HOME MONTH: PLANNING CALENDAR

2021

MAY: Carry out plans made for celebrating the Christian home. Recognize women in the congregation who are mothers in families and mothers in faith. On May 23, Pentecost, have a “wear red” day and recognize those in the congregation who model the love of God. Recognize graduates of high school and college with a prayer in worship. (Remember that many celebrated this milestone last year virtually. Perhaps include those as well this year. Invite those graduates to name someone who helped them learn more about God’s love and how to show God’s love to others.

JUNE: Recognize men in the congregation who are fathers in families and fathers in faith. Create a social media devotional guide for families to use on vacation or at home. Include scripture, meditations, and prayers. Allow church members to contribute by sharing their stories of witnessing acts of love.

JULY: Plan a service project that allows families to help someone in the community who continues to be affected by COVID-19 and the economy. Ask church members to bring school supplies that can be donated to local schools for families who cannot afford to buy supplies for their children. Provide other intentional acts of love in your community.

Recruit a leader and set up a brief adult study of *A Gift of Love: Sermons from “Strength to Love” and Other Preachings* by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (<https://www.amazon.com/Gift-Love-Sermons-Strength-Preachings/dp/0807000639>)

AUGUST: Host a movie night under the stars on church grounds for families in the community. Have a “Blessing of the Backpacks” as part of one worship service before school begins. Create a caring card ministry and deliver cards to a local hospital or nursing care facility.

SEPTEMBER: Hold a parenting class on *Parents and Grandparents as Spiritual Guides* by Betty Shannon Cloyd (available from the Upper Room Bookstore and Cokesbury) to help parents and grandparents reflect on their spiritual lives and how they guide their children.

OCTOBER: Celebrate the Children’s Sabbath during the weekend of October 15-17. Use resources provided by the Children’s Defense Fund. <https://www.childrensdefense.org/programs/faith-based/childrens-sabbath-celebration>. Sponsor a “trunk or treat” or fall festival in your community. Invite church members to decorate their cars, park in the church parking lot, and distribute treats. Offer a free hot dog/chili dinner beforehand. Include activities and service opportunities for children, youth, and adults.

NOVEMBER: Provide a bulletin insert with prayers for families to use in celebrating Thanksgiving. Plan needed resources for celebrating Advent and Christmas in the home. Provide a list of places needing volunteers that would welcome families volunteering together to help those who are without food and shelter during the holiday. Participate in Samaritan’s Purse Operation Christmas Child. Fill a shoebox (or two) with love to neighbors around the world. National Collection Week is November 15 – 22. See <https://www.samaritanspurse.org/what-we-do/operation-christmas-child>.

DECEMBER: Offer an online Advent workshop for families. Invite individuals to bring to the church one Advent/Christmas decoration they use in their home and talk about why this is important to them (during children’s moments in worship). Provide a devotional guide for lighting the Advent wreath and praying together at home. Invite families to create Chrismons to hang in the Hanging of the Greens service or at home on their family tree.

2022

JANUARY: If you haven’t yet used the “Family Covenant for Living Together in Love,” invite families to do so as a New Year’s Resolution. Publish a list of “beat the winter doldrums” ideas. Include such ideas as playing a board game with the family; storytelling of family ancestors; having a stargazing night; picking a favorite Bible story of love and acting it out.

FEBRUARY: Have a daddy-daughter dance the Friday before Valentine’s day for the entire community. Celebrate marriage ministries on the Sunday nearest Valentine’s Day. Recognize anniversaries, engagements, and milestones in the lives of couples in the congregation.

MARCH: Begin plans for celebrating Christian Home Month in May. Host a mother-son tea and get together for the community. Plan a family (or church family) spring break retreat at one of the United Methodist Church Camps and Retreat Centers. For more information and list of locations visit the UMC CRM website, <http://umcrm.camp>. Encourage families to have pancakes the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday (March 2), remembering that with Ash Wednesday, we begin Lent and a time of study and self-denial. Use the Lent resources found at <https://www.UMCdiscipleship.org>.

APRIL: Begin plans for observing Christian Home Month in worship. Ask families to post photos to social media about how they practice love for God and love for one another at home and in their communities. Welcome spring. Hold a family workday at church. Invite those of all ages to come and clean areas of the church that might not have been cleaned for a while. Sort through toys and supplies in the nursery and children’s ministries areas of the church, removing those that are broken or no longer useable.

(continued on next page)

APRIL (cont.): Easter is April 17.

Celebrate Easter in new creative ways, such as creating a flower cross. Make a large cross covered with chicken wire. Invite families to bring Easter flowers from their yards or gardens to church (or provide flowers at church). Encourage everyone to place the flowers on the cross, using the chicken wire to hold the flowers in place. Place the flowered cross outside for the community to see as a sign of God's love celebrated at Easter.

Observe Earth Day on April 22. Join with others in your community to demonstrate God's love with creation care. Creation care is an essential part of discipleship. Raise your family's awareness of our responsibility to care for God's creation.

Begin preparation for observing Christian Home Month 2022: Families Called to Peace.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: RECOMMENDED READING

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

- *The Boy and the Ocean* by Max Lucado; paintings by T. Lively Fluharty (Crossway, 2013)
- *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrate by Rafael López (Nancy Paulsen Books, 2018)
- *God Loves Me More Than That (Dandelion Rhymes)* by Dandi Daley Mackall (Waterbrook, 2008)
- *Growing Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Children* by Melanie Gordon, Susan Groseclose, & Gayle Quay
- *How Big Is Love? (Faith, Hope, Love)*, by Amy Parker (B&H Kids, 2016)
- *Love You This Much (Songs of God's Love)* by Lynn Hodges (Zonderkidz, 2005)
- *Something Happened in Our Town (A Child's Story About Racial Injustice)* by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard, illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin (Magination Press, 2019)

YOUTH BOOKS

- *Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Youth* by Chris Wilterdink (Discipleship Resources, 2016)

ADULT BOOKS

- *Disciples Making Disciples: A Guide for Covenant Discipleship Groups and Class Leaders* by Steven W. Manskar (Discipleship Resources, 2016)
- *A Gift of Love, Sermons from "Strength to Love" and Other Preachings* by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., forward by Coretta Scott King, new forward by the Reverend Dr. Raphael G. Warlock
- *Growing With: Every Parent's Guide to Helping Teenagers and Young Adults Thrive in Their Faith, Family, and Future* by Kara Powell (Baker Books, 2019)
- *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* by Kara Powell (Baker Books, 2016)
- *Parents & Grandparents as Spiritual Guides: Nurturing Children of the Promise* by Betty Shannon Cloyd (Upper Room Books, 2000)
- *Scrambled Starts: Family Prayers for Morning, Bedtime, and Everything in Between* by Jenny Youngman (Upper Room Books, 2015)

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT MINISTRIES WITH FAMILIES

The Christian Home Month Resource, published annually by Discipleship Ministries, is a manual designed for use by leaders with families. Additional resources, ideas, and suggestions for Christian Home Month 2021 and family faith formation can be found online at:

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/intergenerational-family-ministries>

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